

Pet Talk Tuesdays – 10/6/2020

Nick Rusch:

Pet Talk Tuesday. Joining us in the studio, Dr. Marty Greer from Veterinary Village in Lomira. Doc, how are you doing?

Dr. Marty Greer:

We're doing great. Thank you.

Nick Rusch:

Okay. I know you've been incredibly busy, so I'm glad you could be in today.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It is busy, but every veterinary clinic is busy right now. Everybody's getting new puppies and new kittens, and they're home and so they have time to come in for appointments. It's insanely busy.

Nick Rusch:

Have you seen anything like this before?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Never.

Nick Rusch:

You look at the different ways that COVID has affected our lives, and if we wanted to make a list, we wouldn't have any time to talk about anything else today.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Exactly.

Nick Rusch:

Certainly, with your profession particularly, this has got to be unprecedented.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It is, and it's great news. What we want to make sure of is that everybody that gets a pet now can keep the pet and that things go well when their lives, if they change back to normal, whatever normal might be-

Nick Rusch:

Right. Who knows anymore.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Exactly. But if they go back to normal that, when they go back to school or work or their schedule changes or whatever, that their pet can still receive the same kind of relationship that they have now. I've actually started writing a book called The Pandemic Puppy, and it will be published soon.

Nick Rusch:

Oh, fantastic.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It goes through acquisition of your new puppy or dog, and then all the pet care and the behavior things. Mostly it's the behavior that we're worried about. We don't want clients to end up with problems with separation anxiety when they go back to work and their dog's been used to them being home all the time, and there's no PTA meetings and there's no soccer after work and there's no drinks after work, and you don't even go to work. They don't even know that you have real clothes, they just see you in sweats.

Nick Rusch:

Right.

Dr. Marty Greer:

We just don't want to see those things slide back. We're working on that with our clients so that their pets are comfortable with that.

Nick Rusch:

Yeah. It's something you need to think about. You've brought this up before, it's tough on the animals. It's a whole different thing for them. Just like we do, they get used to a routine and you can really mess with them if you don't wean them gradually back into what you're doing.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Exactly. There's tips and techniques that will be in that, and you can also speak to your veterinarians and your veterinary professionals and behaviorists so that you start planning ahead for that.

Nick Rusch:

Yeah. Great idea. Let's talk about, though, we've got Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and this affects pets as well as humans, like so many things we talk about.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It does. We do want to talk about breast cancer awareness. It's not just for your female family members that are human, it's for our dogs and cats, too. Now, we see a lot less breast cancer in cats than we see in dogs, but if cats get breast cancer it's really serious.

Nick Rusch:

It's bad, isn't it?

Dr. Marty Greer:

It's really bad. Very few of them survive the disease because it's such a serious disease. But the good news is we maybe see one of those a year in our practice, so it's very, very uncommon. The more common type of breast cancer that we see is in dogs, and we see it every day, every week. It's really common, especially if the dogs aren't spayed before they're two years old. Now, there's a downside and an upside to that, so I don't want to say that all dogs should be spayed by two, but there is a significant change in the incidents if the dogs aren't spayed by two years of age.

Nick Rusch:

I'm guessing, just like with human patients, that early detection is the key.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Absolutely.

Nick Rusch:

How do we detect this? Is this something we can do at home, or do we have to come see our veterinary professionals?

Dr. Marty Greer:

You actually can do this at home, and it's really simple to detect. Count on your groomer, if your dog goes in for grooming, your groomers have their hands on every inch of your dog, toenails to teeth.

Nick Rusch:

Sure.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It's a great opportunity for them to go over the dog. And if they say to you, "I felt a lump," that means you need to go to the vet. It doesn't matter where the lump is, but especially if it's a mammary tumor. A lump along the mammary chain or the breast chain. Dogs have five sets of mammary glands, cats have between four and five mammary gland pairs. There's one going down the right side, one going down the left side, so you should be aware of that. On a regular monthly basis, just like women check themselves, we should be checking our pets for any evidence of breast cancer. It's simple to detect, it takes a pair of hands, it doesn't require a mammogram. We don't do mammograms on dogs and cats, thank goodness. But it does simply require that, when your dog rolls over for her belly rub, that you go up and down her belly and that you check it at least monthly. If you find anything that you're concerned about that's a lump that doesn't feel right, then you need to bring it to the attention of your veterinarian. It can be started off as just something as tiny as a little hard BB that feels like it's near one of the nipples and that's enough to get your attention and to trot into the vet clinic and have that checked out.

Nick Rusch:

Now, once we've had the detection, once we're through that phase, what is the treatment?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Surgical excision is really the only thing we have as surgery. We go to surgery, we remove that gland. Sometimes we'll remove additional glands if we find evidence of a reason to do that. And that really is curative almost all of the time. I can probably count on one hand the number of dogs that I've seen die from breast cancer. It's a rare cause of death. It is a common thing to see, and the larger the tumor and the larger the dog, the more likely it is to be malignant and to be serious. Small dogs with small tumors are less likely to have a serious disease. Large dogs with large tumors are more likely. But if you detect it early and you get it taken care of early, and if she isn't spayed by that point, it's a good idea to go ahead and spare her at that time, then go ahead, get it taken care of surgically. If more show up, then you just go back to surgery. But it's almost always a curable disease with simply a surgical procedure. There is no chemo and radiation that we have for dogs at this point for mammary cancer.

Nick Rusch:

Once you've done the surgery, is everything else normal for the dog? Let's say the dog would have a litter of puppies, can she lactate and nurse normally?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Generally, yes. If we've only had to do surgery on one gland, she can go ahead and have a normal litter. If she's had to have a whole chain removed, then you should probably have a discussion with your veterinarian about the wisdom of breeding her, not only from the perspective that you didn't spay her, but from the perspective of how is she going to raise puppies if she doesn't have the equipment that it takes. But in general, we see a lot of dogs that, if the tumor is not close enough to the nipple that we need to remove it, we can remove just the tumor itself, and many of those dogs, if they're otherwise in good health and they're young and everything is good, can go ahead and be used for breeding again.

Nick Rusch:

Fantastic.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Not all dogs should be spayed by two years of age, and I do want to mention that there are other kinds of cancer that we get protection against if we leave the dogs intact or not spayed or neutered until they're older. Breast cancer, we can prevent by spaying them by the age of two. We very rarely see it if the dog is spayed by two, but if they're left intact, we see less bone cancer, especially in large breed dogs, less spleen cancer, hemangiosarcoma, which we see mostly in Golden Retrievers, Labradors, German Shepherds, those breeds, and then there's also less lymphosarcoma, which is lymph node cancer, and that can affect dogs of all sizes and all breeds. So we do see protection by waiting to spay, so that's the trade-off. You really need to have a discussion with your veterinarian, know your dog's family history, talk to your veterinarian about your pros and cons of spaying versus not spaying, at what age is it the most ideal.

We can see other health problems that are prevented by leaving the dogs intact. We see less obesity, less orthopedic problems like torn cruciates, less thyroid disease, less allergies. There's a lot of benefits to leaving the dog intact or not spayed or neutered, but those are all trade-offs, and you have to know the breed, you have to know the history, you have to know the family history. It's a good idea to have a real discussion with your veterinarian and not just say, "Well, she's six months old, I was always told that that's the healthiest thing to do for my dog," because in reality it may not be. It depends on your dog's history.

Nick Rusch:

Is it harder now? I actually have a follow-up question to that, I want to circle back. I ran into something over the weekend out on the bike trail, and a guy was running his dog, which was great, and the dog was beautiful. I don't recall the breed name that he told me. I'd never seen a dog like that before. There are more and more dog breeds, it seems to me, than ever, and that's got to be a challenge for you because every breed's a little bit different and I know that much treatment and many treatments are the same across all breeds, but there's also things that are probably breed-specific, so it's got to be a challenge for you guys to keep up. There's more different types of dogs than ever.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah, and that's absolutely the truth. We're seeing more dogs that have been registered in different registries around the world come into the United States. We've seen new combinations of dogs. Yeah, there's definitely more breeds, and we know that there's family history behind them. I saw a Greyhound last week, and her blood values for her kidneys weren't what we normally expect them to be for other breeds, but she's a Greyhound, so she has different blood values. Those are all things that need to be taken into account, and veterinarians are generally pretty well versed in knowing that. There's definitely advantages to having purebred dogs, because by having a purebred dog, you can predict some of the health concerns, you know what to watch for. The breeder you got your dog from can help you with that and tell you, "Oh, my dog has a family history of XYZ, so be vigilant about that or manage it differently or be aware of it." By educating our clients with the breeders involved in that it can really work out to be a good relationship because we learned from the breeders, the buyers learn from the breeders. These are people that may have been breeding dogs for 40 years, so they know their lines and they know what they've got and they know what the health concerns are.

Nick Rusch:

They've been around them.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Absolutely.

Nick Rusch:

The other question then, to circle back, is are there breeds that are more susceptible to breast cancer?

Dr. Marty Greer:

There are, but there's actually a publication that came out of Sweden. It was published in 2012, I believe. You can Google it under Google Scholar, and it compared the incidence of pyometra, which is an infection in the uterus, mammary tumors, which are breast cancer, and then dogs that had both pyometra and mammary tumors. If you're interested in that information, you can go to Google Scholar, type in 2012, and it was a Swedish insurance study, because more dogs are insured in Sweden than we have in the United States, so they have data that we don't have here in the US. Most of the dogs in the US, they may come from rescue or they may come from unknown heritage, but we don't have the pet insurance levels that they have in Sweden.

They collaborated with the veterinary clinics, put together all the data, and they can tell you which dogs are the most likely to have breast cancer. If you're concerned about that or pyometras, just Google it, pull up the article, it was published, and it was presented at the International Symposium for Canine and Feline Reproduction. So yes, you can find that article. If you can't find it, call my office, I will send you the link to it because it's on Google Scholar and it's easy to find. It's not one of those articles you have to subscribe to to get access to.

Nick Rusch:

Is this something that dogs can age out of, or is this a concern from-

Dr. Marty Greer:

No. Actually, the older dogs get, the more likely they are to have breast cancer, and dogs don't go through menopause, which surprises a lot of people, nor do cats.

Nick Rusch:

I never thought of it.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. Well, probably not. But a lot of people make the assumption that, when their dog is 12 years old, she's too old to have puppies anymore. Unfortunately-

Nick Rusch:

Not the case.

Dr. Marty Greer:

No. If she found herself a boyfriend, yeah, you're still going to be blessed with a litter of puppies even at age 12.

Nick Rusch:

Wow.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Don't be caught unprepared. If you're not planning to have puppies, then you should make precautionary arrangements or spay her.

Nick Rusch:

Because you never know who's in the neighborhood.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Sometimes you do know who's in the neighborhood.

Nick Rusch:

Sometimes you do and sometimes you don't.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Sometimes that's the problem.

Nick Rusch:

That's the problem.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah, the German Shepherd next door may come visiting.

Nick Rusch:

May come around.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Exactly.

Nick Rusch:

You just never do know. What else should we cover today?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Oh, gosh. I really think that the last thing is don't forget that, when the weather starts to get cold, that fleas and ticks are still a problem. I pulled a big old tick off of a little white dog yesterday. She was surprised, the dog barely goes outside. She had a big old juicy tick on her. Ticks are the worst between November and March, for deer ticks in particular. And fleas, this time of year, hop onto our dogs and cats, come into the house because it's starting to get cold out, and there's a nice warm meal inside. This is the time to not stop using your flea and tick preventives. A lot of people are like, "Oh, it's cold out, I can quit now." No, that's when you're going to get caught off guard.

Nick Rusch:

No, that's the worst.

Dr. Marty Greer:

We see our most fleas in October and November, so don't be caught off guard by that.

Nick Rusch:

Incredible, really, when you think about all the care that an animal takes, and that's why, it's like you say earlier when we were talking about with people changing their patterns, you really have to keep your pets in mind with everything that you do.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Absolutely.

Nick Rusch:

Because it's their life, too.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yep. They know which shoes you put on when you're going to go have fun on a walk and which shoes you put on when you're leaving them at home. They get it pretty fast, so don't overlook how smart those little dogs and cats are.

Nick Rusch:

Yeah, they're paying attention.

Dr. Marty Greer:

They are, just to everything.

Nick Rusch:

Yeah. You don't think they are, but they are.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Exactly. They may open one eye and look at you from across the room.

Nick Rusch:

No, they got it.

Dr. Marty Greer:

They got it. They know when you're thinking about opening a can of dog food, they know. When you're thinking about opening the refrigerator, they're out there waiting for it. So, yeah, they're all over it. They're very intuitive and they pay attention to things and pick up on cues that we never think about.

Nick Rusch:

Right. Part of that is it's built into their DNA. It's part of their survival skills from long ago.

Dr. Marty Greer:

That's right.

Nick Rusch:

It's right there.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It makes them cool and it's why we love them, but it does have a two-sided coin like everything else, you got to watch them.

Nick Rusch:

Now, as busy as you've been at work, because I know you've been busy, how are the animals at home doing? And how have they adapted to your changes?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well, our changes haven't been that significant, except that we've decided to have another litter of puppies this year, because, hey-

Nick Rusch:

Why not, right?

Dr. Marty Greer:

I'm not traveling. I can't go anywhere. I'm usually on the road every weekend in the spring and every weekend in the fall speaking at different dog events, but not this year, so, hey, we'll just have more puppies because, I'll tell you what, people are coming out of the woodwork buying dogs, and they're desperate. They want purebred dogs, they want mixed breed dogs, they're just desperate for dogs. We actually had one client that said she was getting a death threat because someone couldn't provide her a puppy.

Nick Rusch:

Oh, for gosh sake.

Dr. Marty Greer:

People need to calm down a little bit, get your name on a breeder's list, be cooperative. If they ask you to fill out a questionnaire, fill it out, be nice, and then be in touch.

Nick Rusch:

That is the second incidence I've heard of, and I won't tell you who, but I have a friend in another community who has a relative who is a healthcare worker who has received a death threat. This person is incredibly intelligent, incredibly responsible, and is responsible for informing people about what's going on. Don't shoot the messenger.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Exactly.

Nick Rusch:

Ridiculous, and it doesn't get us anywhere. I can't imagine a dog breeder getting a... Oh, my goodness.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. Be nice to your breeders. They're trying, but it takes 63 days to grow a puppy.

Nick Rusch:

Try not to threaten them.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Exactly. But it takes 63 days from the time a dog comes into heat until she's bred and to have the puppies, and then you need to keep them at least 8 to 10 more weeks before they're ready to go, and they only come into heat usually every 6 months, but some dogs come into heat every 8 months or every 12 months. I have people that call and they're like, "I want a male, black puppy." And I said, "Well, there's no window into her uterus. I cannot predict what color nor what sex the puppy is going to be, so we're going to have to wait until they're born."

Nick Rusch:

Wow. Wow.

Dr. Marty Greer:

But people are excited, and it's great news that people want to have companionship.

Nick Rusch:

That is great.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah.

Nick Rusch:

That is great. Now, what type of dogs are we talking about here?

Dr. Marty Greer:

I have Danish-Swedish farm dogs and Pembroke Welsh Corgis. I have one litter of Corgis, one litter of farm dogs, and a farm dog litter on the way.

Nick Rusch:

I love the Corgis.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah, they're cool.

Nick Rusch:

My wife's in love with Corgis. They're a very cool dog.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yep. They're very cool.

Nick Rusch:

They're just like me, short and Welsh.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well, there you go.

Nick Rusch:

They're just like me. They're much cuter, and probably in many cases, much smarter.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well, I don't know. They are pretty smart.

Nick Rusch:

Of those two types, how many can we expect from each litter?

Dr. Marty Greer:

I have five Corgis, I have four farm dogs, and I've got to take an x-ray today to see how many farm dogs are coming in this litter. It's typically between 4 and 6, but I've had as many as 10 Corgis in one litter, and I've had as few as 1. So it's highly variable depending on the age and the fertility of the female.

Nick Rusch:

Your house has got to be chaos.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It is chaos, but it's a good kind of chaos.

Nick Rusch:

Let's give everybody your contact information for all of your information. We want to keep you busy because that keeps you out of trouble.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It does, and otherwise I do find my way into trouble. Our phone number is (920) 269-4000. Our website is SmallAnimalClinic.com, because it's hard to spell VeterinaryVillage.com, but if you do that, you'll find it. It's the same website.

Nick Rusch:

It'll get there.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. We're at the corner of Highway 41 and 49, just south of Fond du Lac. So we're just a hop, skip, and a jump down the road across from Quad Graphics. We are there seven days a week, so we're open Monday through Sunday, we're there Sunday afternoons, all day Saturday, and Monday through Friday during regular hours. We're there to help. We're happy to see people. It's hard to get into the emergency clinics even right now, so please keep your dogs up-to-date on their preventive care. And if you need veterinary care, get ahold of us when you need us so that we can help you out.

Nick Rusch:

Do what you can to keep them healthy, and do the research and pay attention to all the information. There's more information out there than ever before, which is great.

Dr. Marty Greer:

And use a leash.

Nick Rusch:

And use a leash.

Dr. Marty Greer:

And a crate when you drive so that your dog stays safe while you're traveling.

Nick Rusch:

Absolutely.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Please.

Nick Rusch:

Yeah. Great advice. Doc, it's always a pleasure.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Thank you.

Nick Rusch:

I always get a kick out of talking to you. We have a lot of fun.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Thank you.

Nick Rusch:

This is one of my favorite shows.